1: Blackwood E-5 (1929-1930) 1935
ON6 Buka ON6
Kurtatchi

this involves some skill on the part of the beaters, and no small amount of muscular energy is also required to give the necessary volume of sound, so that if a *kōma* continues for hours together, as it usually does, several men must take turns at beating the rhythm.

For sending messages only one *garamuts* is used, the largest in the village, which is usually to be found in the portico of the most important *tsunaun*'s house. The sound carries for several miles. I have known people to be recalled to the village by it from a taro garden at least four miles away, and have no doubt that the sound can be heard for much longer distances, given suitable atmospheric conditions.

The method differs from that used with the 'talking drums' of West Africa, which reproduce messages of any kind by means of tonal differences. The slit-gong sends only certain recognized messages, using a kind of Morse code of long and short beats. These signals differ in different localities. A number of those in use on the island of Pororan are given by Gordon Thomas (1931, p. 225). Some of the chief signals in use at Kurtatchi are as follows:

1. Visit of some one of importance:

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Any one working in the taro garden when this signal is heard at once returns to the village. It is, therefore, used also if the presence, say, of the *tsunaun* is urgently required. It will be used if the report arrives that the District Officer is on his way to the village.

2. To announce the death of a person of rank:

...! ...! ...! ...! ...! ...! .....
! // // ...//

The *garamuts* is not beaten at the death of commoners.

3. At the end of the women's special dance at funerary rites for a *tsunaun*:

//// .. !..!..!..////..!..!..!..////

4. To announce a feast:

//.....!.....!..... .... !.//.//.///////
.....////

5. To announce the end of a feast:

/// ....
! ...!...//...//..//.!.!

1: Blackwood E-5 (1929-1930) 1935
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765 set up a tree with plenty of branches on it in the middle of the place called *wanib*, and hang up the belts on it.

Some additional details concerning the women's first visit to the taro garden after their seclusion were given me in the course of an account by another informant, an old man, at a later date. The widow plants a taro stalk, another woman takes it out again and lays it on the ground, then another woman plants it again, and this goes on till all the women in the village have had their turn.

[778] Then the women stick up a tree in the taro garden and hang ornamental and aromatic leaves on it; the widow, as she hangs each spray, calls out the names of all her relatives who are dead, saying: 'My mother, I put this *nibnib* (ornamental plant) for you', 'My father, I put this *nibnib* for you', and similarly for her brother, her sister, her child, her *waris*, if they are dead.

[565] Then one man who is *tsunaun* makes a fire and calls the names of all the *urar*, who have died before. He puts taro, coco-nuts, and areca-nuts on the fire, the fire burns them up. Then the men start working on the taro garden, clearing away the rubbish, and the women plant.[1] While they are working they must not eat. If they were to do so, the *urar* would fight them and make them mad. They all put lime in front of their ears. They take down the belts from the tree where they have been hanging and put them on again. Then, if the fire has been made and the food burnt, they may eat a little in the *wanib*.

765 824 565 Then a *ta'un* plant (a species of cordyline) is planted in the *wanib*. Every one goes off and hides just outside the taro garden. The *ta'un* plant stands up on the edge of the taro garden. Then a man who is *tsunaun* calls out the name of the man who has died. The wild spirits of the bush answer the first time, the man calls out twice more, then the dead man's own spirit (*abin*) comes howling. The *tsunaun* calls out: 'You come, let us go to the village, all the people have gone.' They all look at the *ta'un*; if it bends over, the man's spirit (*abin*) is sitting on it.[2] If it does not bend, the

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[1] As explained in Chapter I, taro can be planted at any time of the year.

[2] Compare with this the procedure employed to know whether a man gravely ill will die or will recover. 'Take the root of the plant *markɔ̃t* and give some to the sick man to eat. Take also a small branch of the same plant and hold it upright near him. If he is to die his *abin* will come and sit on top of the branch and it will bend over, if he will live it will stay straight.' This procedure was taught to Tchiriv by the *urar* at a time when he was *iburar*. They also taught it to another man who is now dead.

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535 The Buka dance or *guma* is an uninteresting spectacle. Unlike other Melanesian dances there is very little action and the [535] accompanying singing is but a constant repetition of " O-a-o-a " in as many keys as the human voice is capable of rendering. The men walk slowly around in a circle while the women, standing some ten yards away, advance to the edge of the circle from time to time and in pairs bend their bodies backwards and forwards, or in threes and fours skip sideways to and fro. From a distance the singing is often harmonious, but when heard at close quarters it is both ear-splitting and appalling to a musical listener.

[534] The singing is accompanied by the beating of the hollowed-out 202 wooden drums (*tui*) with series of short staccato raps from the soft-nosed beaters. These *tui* can be heard for many miles when weather conditions are favourable and are used extensively for signalling. Some of the Buka districts have elaborate *tui* codes, and are able to send detailed messages from village to village. Among the more ● [763] simplified signals is that denoting a death and is made by ten long beats, pause, three short, pause, three short, pause, five short, pause, five short, pause, and ten long. When a man is annoyed over something (his wife has failed to cook the taro, or a pig has died) and he wishes to " tell the world " he raps out ten long beats, a pause, then another ten long beats. The arrival of a stranger in a village is denoted by three long beats, pause, followed by three series of seven short beats interspersed with pauses. The general call to assemble in a village is three series of three shorts and one long beat.

302 The men usually wear their hair long and combed upright. [346] The hair of a woman is close-cropped, except when she has given birth to a child and then it is allowed to grow long until the child is able to crawl about. The women wear a hood made from pandanus 291 leaves sewn horizontally together, with every other leaf dyed red 386 with the root of a bush. This custom is to prevent certain of their male relatives from seeing their hair, which is taboo. A loin cloth 291 of red or coloured print serves as the general garment for both sexes. 177 A few years ago the women wore a small grass *tahu*, and in former days the men wore no covering.

Each village has, amongst its older men and women, some with 278
a very fair knowledge of native medicines and also, unfortunately, 757
one or two with a secret knowledge of poisons. The administration
of curative and prophylactic medicines is usually accompanied by
elaborate rites which the patient must rigidly observe. Contra-
ceptives are commonly used by the women and one herb is claimed
to be what might be termed a "contra-contraceptive," *i.e.*, after
a woman has been barren for several years, as a result of taking a
contraceptive, this herb will make her fertile again. When epidemics 751
occur villages as yet untouched will place small sticks, leaning out-
wards, on the various roads to ward off the arrival of the spirit of
sickness. The sticks are smeared with the spittle of betel-nut, 763
pepper and lime. If the cry of a certain night-bird is heard over a 787
village where a patient lies dangerously ill, it is usual then for any
further attempt to combat the illness to cease. Death has spoken.
The bird's call is looked upon as the inevitable token of death, and
the relations commence to gather together their presents for the dead
in readiness for throwing them into the coffin or grave. It is strange,
but the cases where to my own knowledge the bird's call has actually
preceded the death of a patient have been numerous.

DRUM SIGNALLING ON PORORAN ISLAND

Pororan legend has it that in the days of long ago (*manus*) 773
before drum signalling had been introduced a strange resonant noise 534
was heard coming from the bush by the men of the village one
evening. Half fearful investigations were made and it was found
that the noise came from a swinging branch beaten by the wind upon
a hollow tree. From this sprang the idea of the *tui*, or wooden
drum, which is used so extensively throughout Buka, Bougainville
and other Melanesian islands.

The making of these drums in the early days, before steel 534
implements were introduced, was a long, tedious and almost sacred
performance. In many of the *tui* the aperture at the top is but an
inch to an inch and a half in width extending the full length of the
drum, while the outer circumference measures in many cases as
much as eight feet six inches. Sharpened clam-shells, fastened to [413]
spear hafts or long sticks were the only tools used for the work.